



Students of War

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

— Sun Tzu

In his book “Art of War,” Sun Tzu’s expertise on the subject of military strategy is as true today as it was in China 2,000 years ago. Instead of bows, arrows and spears, today’s Airmen must master fighter aircraft, M-4s and missiles. Instead of traditional enemies, they battle terrorists.

In line with Sun Tzu’s teachings, Airmen of today learn about themselves and their enemy by attending military training. With the global war on terrorism raging around the world, students know that what they learn today may

save their lives tomorrow.

For Airmen, the road to learning begins at basic training and progresses throughout their careers. The task of ensuring every Airman is armed with the knowledge and tools needed to become a war fighter falls on the shoulders of Maj. Gen. Chip Utterback, 2nd Air Force commander at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. He’s responsible for development, oversight and direction of all operational aspects of military training, initial skills training and advanced technical training.

It's a duty he doesn't take lightly. "The war brings a sense of urgency to what we teach," the general said. "It motivates our students and instructors to make the most out of every minute of instruction. We value the investment in our Airmen and can't afford to lose them in training, so we go that extra mile to inject more realism in our classrooms. Through realistic instruction and exercises, we are able to push our students to higher levels of achievement. After all, today's Airmen are brighter than ever so we definitely don't want to bore them."

Capt. Vince Cyran, 62nd Fighter Squadron instructor pilot, demonstrates how to maneuver in the F-16 simulator to student Capt. Will Parrot at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. Advancing technologies like this simulator have become a necessity for Air Force training schools to engage students in more real-world scenarios and challenges.

by Airman 1st Class Teri Smith



In today's world of text messaging, hand-held game devices and digital cameras, the general said it's a challenge for him to think of ways instructors can keep the attention of the 18- and 19-year-olds. He said it's tough to outdo a visually stimulating environment of 30-second sound bites and near real-time communications.

Gone are the days of paper, pencils and chalkboards. Also on the absentee list are the long boring lectures and "death by PowerPoint." Say "hello" to interactive smart boards, hands-on training, mock-ups and simulators.

It's been more than a decade since 29-year-old Airman 1st Class William Friesell had seen the inside of a classroom. However, what the student firefighter has seen so far, he likes.

"Our instructors don't teach what they think you might deal with — they get right down to a straight forward approach to practical training," said the Rye, New

York native. "I think we retain more because once they show you what they're talking about, we go right out and practice it."

In classrooms around the world, the key word is hands-on training.

"There's a lot of information that we get, and we need to make it second nature," said Airman First Class Scott Robotham, an 18-year-old basic trainee at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. "When we [deploy], this information may save our lives. If we have to stop and think about it, we may not come back. So, we just practice, practice, practice."

On the other end of the spectrum, instructors are finding it difficult to cram everything they need to teach in the amount of time allotted. Capt. Michael Luterzo, a security forces director of operations at Lackland, said his schoolhouse not only extended training by 14 days in one course, but he could comfortably tack on another 15 days.

"Our main focus is war," said the captain, a native of Youngstown, Ohio.

"We teach all the combat skills needed for our folks to deploy. Once they graduate, they are fit for duty world-wide," said Captain Luterzo, who has deployed to Ali Al Salem in Kuwait.

Like the captain, many instructors have at least one deployment under their belts. General Utterback said it's important for instructors to bring that war experience into the classroom, which is why Air Education and Training Command began a three-year limit on instructors' tours of duty.

Three years and you're out

Gone are the days of instructors "homesteading" at bases for 10 to 12 years. The Air Force needs instructors who are connected with today's battlespace, and it needs them about every three years.

by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers



Airman 1st Class Robert Little researches data for an aircrew pre-mission brief as part of Lone Star, a weeklong intelligence community exercise at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas. The exercise not only allows enlisted and officers the ability to interact, but also provides intense hands-on training that is vital to success in the field.

"Our adversaries tactics, our procedures and tactics, and our weapon systems change rapidly. So, we in AETC, need to adapt rapidly as well and that means refreshing our instructor corps on a regular basis," the general said.

"It's important to rotate out to our career fields so we can stay current in our operational Air Force," agreed

Want more info

For more details about the Air Education and Training Command, log onto www.aetc.randolph.af.mil

Staff Sgt. Blaine Listenbee, a military training instructor at Lackland. “If we can convince others to be trainers, they can bring their experiences into the classroom, as well as bring continuity to this environment.”

The general said the Air Force can’t stay in step and be the world’s best air and space force without instructors who are immersed in today’s dynamic battlefield requirements, evolving procedures and advances in technology.

“Currency and experience are tremendous force multipliers,” he said.

Situations are unreal

To keep students on the cutting edge, many instructors are testing their students’ knowledge through simulated scenarios and exercises. It not only gets the students out of the classroom, but it also gives them hands-on training and tests their problem-solving skills.

For the intelligence community, their know-how is

Senior Airman Timothy Lincoln’s seven-month stint as a convoy escort in Iraq earned him a spot on the list of cadre at the combat convoy course at Camp Bullis in San Antonio. The transportation specialist (forefront) is part of a push by Air Force training schools to bring in instructors who can relay their real-world experiences to students, preparing them for the battlefield.

by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers



tested in a student exercise known as Lone Star at Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas.

In Lone Star, officers and enlisted in the basic intelligence course interact to complete a mission. Of course, it’s never easy. Instructors throw challenges at them, and then unleash little gremlins that create chaos with their students’ plans. Students must learn to adapt and overcome and also gel as a team.

“We give them the basics,” said Staff Sgt. Lisa Davis, an intelligence applications journeyman instructor. “Once they build on the basic skills, they can then use their newly acquired knowledge to analyze what the enemies will do next,” said the Great Falls, Mont., native.

General Utterback said, “New entries into the intelligence community must understand the construct in which we fight. If we don’t train that way every day, then we’re just giving them ‘book learning.’ That doesn’t translate well with some of the things we’re doing today. We need to teach our intel students to be predictors — not just regurgitators of information.”

The communications community goes a step further. At Keesler, one communications course ends with students spending five days in the field. They use the same equipment they’d be using if deployed to war.

“Our students get to see the entire deployment process,” said Master Sgt. Billy Driebergen, a ground

radio communications instructor. “It really builds their confidence.”

Perhaps some of the most challenging training is done at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, in what is known in the medical community as Top Star. The training is required before each deployment.

They actually deploy students to a bare-bones location — no TV, no off-base liberty, no time to themselves. The 12-hour plus days tests their stamina, while instructors test their knowledge. By the end of the week, students will have spent more than 60 hours in nature’s classroom.

As a former Army soldier, Staff Sgt. Caroline Rogers is no stranger to field exercises. But even she learned something new after attending training in February.

“For the longest time, I didn’t know what the real concept was,” said the health services management specialist who works at a clinic at Dobbins Air Force Base, Ga. “But I didn’t know what I’d be doing in the field. I know now that I’ll be a jack of all trades.”

The medical community stresses cross-functional capability. That way, if something should happen to one person, another person can step in and take over. At Top Star, a nurse may also be taught to be a dietician, like Master Sgt. Felicia Grillo, who deployed from Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., to attend the training.

“We have to count on one another and build a bond,” she said. “Our goal is to keep our heroes comfortable so we can get them back home.”

Training to go

However, what if you can’t attend formal training, be it in the field or in a classroom?

One answer is the instructors come to you by way of mobile training teams. When a training need is identified, a team can travel base to base, teaching what’s needed.

Courses are also offered on compact discs and through the Internet. The training command even uses satellite technology to transmit throughout the world, including live feeds to the desert.

By all mediums possible, the command somehow finds a way to train more than 250 Air Force specialties through 2,500 courses, graduating 225,000 Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and foreign students annually.

graphic by Patrick Harris



The war on terror has brought about many changes to the Air Force’s training environment. Instructors have learned to adapt to the ever-changing strategies of the enemy and incorporate lessons learned into their curriculum as quickly as possible.

To instill a more expeditionary mindset to new recruits, basic training is in the midst of change.

“When I joined in 1993, training instructors were focused on attention to detail and following simple instruction,” Sergeant Listenbee said. “But now we focus more on physical training and war fighting.”

The Air Force is restructuring and re-sequencing basic military training to give basic trainees more expeditionary training up front. Part of the change

is being labeled BEAST: Basic Expeditionary Airman Skill Training.

The basic trainees will be taken from a mobility line to a week of training in the field. Although many won’t deploy im-

mediately to war after graduation, a few actually do. After going through BEAST, they will at least have been exposed to the process once.

“In today’s expeditionary environment, we have to ensure our training is as challenging, realistic, meaningful and applicable as possible,” the general said. “That forces us to be more flexible in delivery and adaptable to change. It forces us to do things in new ways. We’re heading in the right direction. You can take that to the bank.”